



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF JOHN FREDERICK MAY, M.D.

By WILLIAM HENRY DENNIS.

The founder in this country of the family of the late Dr. John Frederick May appears to have been John May, who was born in England in 1590, crossed the Atlantic in 1635, and finally settled in Roxbury, Mass., in 1640.

The father of the subject of this sketch was Dr. Frederick May, who was born in 1773 and died January 23, 1849. He was a graduate of Dartmouth College and Harvard University (1792), studied medicine with Dr. John Warren, and lived about fifty years in Washington, as an eminent physician and an influential and useful citizen. He was medical professor in Columbian College, and his lectures, delivered without notes, were very instructive and impressive. He was one of the projectors of the Long Bridge over the Potomac, and an original corporator of the Medical Society of the District.

Dr. John Frederick May was born in Washington, May 19, 1812, and died here May 1, 1891. He had a brilliant reputation in medicine and surgery, having been the first in this part of the world to perform successfully the operation of amputation at the hip joint.

He was a student of Columbian College in 1831, was graduated in medicine in 1834, and completed his studies in Paris in 1837. He was professor of surgery in the University of Maryland at the age of twenty-five. In 1841 he aided in reorganizing the Medical Department of Columbian College, and was professor of

anatomy and surgery therein until 1858. He was a man of commanding presence, and of that powerful and impressive physique which is characteristic of the family. He left a widow, two sons and four daughters, all of whom are living except one daughter, the late Mrs. Wm. C. Whitney.

One of his brothers was Charles May, of the Army, commander of the celebrated "May's Dragoons" in the Mexican War. Another brother, George May, became a leading citizen, of large fortune, at New Orleans. Another brother was Henry May, of Baltimore, who was a Representative in Congress before the Civil War, and left a large family, some of whom now reside in Washington.

Among the many important events in the long and honorable career of Dr. John Frederick May, that which attracted the widest and most intense interest was his remarkable association, in his professional capacity as a surgeon, with the tragedy of the murder of President Lincoln. Long afterwards, in January, 1887, he wrote his observations on this subject, in a paper which he entitled "The Mark of the Scalpel." It was not published during his life, and only fragmentary extracts from it have been printed in a few newspapers since his death.

Its historical importance is derived from Dr. May's positive and scientific identification of the body of John Wilkes Booth, before its burial at Washington. This refers to a question which is still actively debated; and only about a year ago, in 1908, a book was published purporting to be written by a lawyer in Tennessee, named Finis L. Bates, solemnly arguing that Booth was alive until 1903, when he committed suicide at Enid, in Oklahoma, where he was known as "David E. George." Besides the intrinsic interest of Dr. May's

paper, it has value as tending to lay at rest this vain and rather wild controversy.

Although the fact is not mentioned in the following paper, Dr. May, on account of his eminence as a surgeon, was summoned hurriedly to the bedside of the dying Lincoln, probed the wound, and confirmed the sad opinion that human skill could do nothing to avert the fatal result.

THE MARK OF THE SCALPEL.*

BY JOHN FREDERICK MAY, M.D.

(Read before the Society, February 9, 1909, by William Henry Dennis at the request of the Board of Managers, the ensuing twelfth of February being the centennial of President Lincoln's birth.)

Was the body brought to the Navy Yard at Washington, about two weeks after the assassination of President Lincoln, and there seen on a Government steamer, that of John Wilkes Booth?

Such is the question I was often asked at that time, both orally and also by letters; some dictated by patriotism, and others from curiosity.

And it is well known there was much doubt on this subject; and strange as it may appear, I have credibly been told there are still persons living who do not believe that was the body of the assassin of the President of the United States.

Personal identification, as we know, is far from being certain; and especially may this be said of identification after death. Without citing the celebrated and extraordinary case of "The Claimant" [in the Tichborne case] many others might be found to show that persons have often been supposed to be living, after the most indubitable evidence to prove they were dead. From them, one very remarkable historical instance may be selected, to show how far popular credulity may be extended as to personal identity after death.

* This paper is now printed, in its entirety, for the first time.